

Supplement to Minutes from December 1, 2005 Advisory Council Meeting

State Agency Reports - Summarized

Reports provided by:

John Gaver (MDOT/MVA)

Will Johnson (DHR)

Linda Webb (DHCD)

Vanessa Antrum (DHMH)

Paul Farrell (MSDE)

Howard Leonard (MSDE/DORS)

Maryland Department of Transportation/Motor Vehicle Administration – John Gaver

On December 2, 2005 there will be a meeting between MDOT/MVA, Advisory Council members, ODHHS staff and the Governor's Chief of Staff, Craig Williams to discuss the issue of driver's education for deaf and hard of hearing drivers at the State House in the Governor's Conference Room. A complete report on the result of this meeting will be presented at the next Advisory Council meeting in March 2006.

In November MDOT hosted a Secretary's Conference on ADA and Disability that Yvonne Dunkle and the Lt. Governor attended.

Maryland Human Resources – Will Johnson

The MHR is the state's social service agency overseeing all local jurisdictions. There is no one specific plan for deaf and hard of hearing people other than they are included in all services provided by the agency. If accommodations are requested, such as interpreter services, they are provided to the consumer via an interpreting services contract.

Department of Housing and Community Development-Linda Webb

Shortly after taking office, Governor Ehrlich appointed a Housing Commission that came up with eight different recommendations of which three focus on the needs of people with disabilities. Secretary Cox, MDOD, served on the Commission. For details, please check our website, www.mdhousing.org to find a copy of the Commission's report. Passed out to council members was a packet of materials designed to help consumers obtain loans or grants to purchase a home.

Loan and grant programs are advertised to real estate professionals at the Secretary's Breakfast, which in the past has drawn close to 500 realtors, and also to the community via a myriad of public relations methods.

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene/Developmental Disabilities Administration – Vanessa Antrum

DDA recently held a successful training for area service providers. Trainers from Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) were brought in for a three-day training focusing on the challenges faced by deaf-blind individuals. Attendees (service providers) were blindfolded as they were led into a cafeteria to participate in a family-style meal. Since attendees were not spoken to, they were able to more closely experience what their consumer's experience. This was beneficial sensory awareness training for service providers.

Additionally, DDA provides sign language interpreters for consumers who request the service.

Maryland State Department of Education- Paul Farrell

The Division of Special Education Early Intervention, Infants and Toddlers Program provides services and support to preschool and special education programs for children with disabilities from birth through age 5. We coordinate funding, technical assistance, training and monitoring activities pursuant to Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

In addition, I am the Director of the Hearing Aid Loan Bank, which was created by Maryland legislation in 2001. The Loan Bank was created to provide infants and toddlers under the age of 3 with immediate access to hearing aids following confirmation of hearing loss by an audiologist. The loan period is up to 6 months, which gives parents or guardians adequate time to secure permanent hearing aids or a cochlear implant using either their personal resources or community assistance programs.

Another program administered by MSDE is the Maryland Quality Assurance Screening (MQAS) for Educational Interpreters. The purpose of the MQAS is to screen and assess the knowledge and skills of Educational Interpreters currently providing services to students who are deaf and hard of hearing in the local school systems. Recently MSDE posted a job announcement for the coordinator of the MQAS and as of this time the position has not been filled.

A work group has been convened to study the issue of ASL classes that are taught in schools and how the credits are used for graduation requirements, specifically, that the credits be used as foreign language credit and not elective credit. It has been raised by ODHH that there is no deaf membership on that work group. This concern will be brought back to MSDE for consideration.

Lastly there was a question regarding the number of deaf and hard of hearing teachers employed by the school systems who work with deaf and hard of hearing students that will be researched and reported on at the next Advisory Council meeting.

MSDE/Division of Rehabilitation Services – Howard Leonard

DORS is one part of MSDE and one feature of MSDE is the transition process from school to employment. Even though this process is in place and Transition Specialists are employed to work in the schools with students who have disabilities few specialists possess the expertise needed to work with deaf and hard of hearing students. More work needs to be done in this area of service. For example a Transition Fair was held in October but few public school students were able to attend. Now DORS is working with the Transition Coordinator to improve information dissemination to students in the future.

DORS has about 3-4 counselors who specialize in deaf services around the state to try to better match and prepare deaf and hard of hearing applicants for jobs that match their education level or skill level. Several major obstacles are faced. One being the education and advocacy component to potential employers regarding the costs associated with making accommodations. Compounding the issue is the frustration felt by college educated deaf individuals who cannot find employment at all or who are underemployed.

One important issue that needs to be addressed is a segment of the deaf population that consider themselves to be more of a cultural or linguistic minority meaning they don't necessarily feel disabled as long as they have all the necessary accommodations permitting them to function quite well. But within the deaf community there are still a lot of people who don't function on that level for a variety of reasons such as misdiagnoses, lack of education, or additional disabilities. What ever the reason there are individuals who require long-term supports that DORS cannot provide for. This population is referred to as "traditionally underserved" or "low functioning".

To address the service needs for this population DORS conducted a pilot project two years ago in Montgomery County. Partnering with Trancends and Deaf Reach this case-management style intensive project worked with 30 individuals providing support across all life issues (i.e., housing, job coaching, behavior issues) so that these individuals could be placed in employment and supported to retain their jobs. The results are very positive – after two years all 30 individuals remain employed. The problem is that DORS is not funded to continue doing "special projects". However the results of this two-year study show that this population is really eligible for long-term supports from DDA and DHMH. There needs to be a collaborative effort between DORS, DDA, MHA and other stakeholders, maybe with ODHH facilitating, to come up with a funding mechanism to keep such a program functioning.